

FACULTY-LED PRE-DEPARTURE HANDBOOK



UPDATED APRIL 2022



PRE-DEPARTURE ORIENTATION MANUAL

TU FACULTY-LED STUDY ABROAD & AWAY PROGRAMS



IMPORTANT! Take this manual with you for reference.

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CONTACT INFORMATION

Study Abroad & Away Office

Towson University
Psychology Building, Rm. # 408
8000 York Road
Towson, MD 21252
Phone: 410-704-2451
Email: studyabroad@towson.edu

Towson University Police

In case of an emergency outside regular office hours, please contact the Towson University Police who will reach the advisor on call:

Tel: 410-704-4444

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ACADEMIC & ADMINISTRATIVE PRE-DEPARTURE

Registration and payment

The TU Study Abroad & Away Office will register you for study abroad or away prior to the beginning of the program.

The program deposit is due upon application and is non-refundable if admitted to the program. In the case of program cancellation the deposit will be returned to you. The deposit will offset the total amount owed for the program. You will also be charged a \$190 study abroad/away fee. You will receive an email notification from the TU Bursar's Office when your bill is ready for payment.

Once admitted into the program by the TU Study Abroad & Away Office, you are responsible for the full program fee. Should you wish to withdraw from the program for any reason after admission, only recoverable expenses may be refunded. Non-recoverable expenses may include, but are not limited to, costs paid to a program provider, travel agency, or other third party organization by TU on your behalf; housing; transportation; non-refundable deposits; activity fees; honorariums; guest lecture fees. **Towson University withdrawal/drop/add deadlines do not apply. You must submit your intention to withdraw IN WRITING to the TU Study Abroad & Away Office.**

Overseas health insurance

The well-being of students participating in Towson University study abroad and away programs is our top priority. To support a healthy and safe experience, Towson University provides a health insurance and assistance plan to all students participating on Towson University Study Abroad Programs. This is not an optional benefit; every participant on a Towson University administered study abroad program will be covered by the insurance plan and the cost is included in the program fee. Students participating on Study Away Programs within U.S. territories (e.g., Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, etc.) will also be enrolled into the insurance plan. Participants on Study Away Programs within the 50 states are not enrolled into an additional health insurance plan and should defer to their existing individual health insurance coverage.

All eligible participants will be automatically enrolled and will receive access to their individual ID card that includes contact information for plan services. Students and parents are strongly advised to become familiar with the Towson University Plan's benefits and features.

Upon setting foot back on U.S. soil, most study abroad insurance policies will no longer be in effect. In case of injury or serious illness resulting in the need to return to the U.S. for treatment, coverage will need to be in place here in the U.S. Therefore, we strongly advise that students also maintain a U.S. health insurance policy while abroad.

If you plan to extend your stay after the program or will arrive before the group, you should obtain an extension of your coverage. Speak with the TU Study Abroad & Away Advisor responsible for your program in advance.

Post-Acceptance Information

You are required to complete your Post-Acceptance Information in TU Horizons Online by the indicated deadlines.

Withdrawal from a TU faculty-led short-term study abroad or away program

If you withdraw from a TU faculty-led study abroad or away program prior to departure, you must inform the TU Study Abroad & Away Office in writing. Your letter or email should state the reason for withdrawal. The deposit submitted with your application will not be refunded.

Additionally, once admitted into the program by the TU Study Abroad & Away Office, you are responsible for the full program fee. Should you wish to withdraw from the program for any reason after admission, only recoverable expenses may be refunded. Non-recoverable expenses may include, but are not limited to, costs paid to a program provider, travel agency, or other third party organization by TU on your behalf; housing; transportation; non-refundable deposits; activity fees; honorariums; guest lecture fees. **Towson University withdrawal/drop/add deadlines do not apply. You must submit your intention to withdraw IN WRITING to the TU Study Abroad & Away Office.**

Academic and behavioral expectations for faculty-led programs

As a study abroad or away student you are still bound to the Towson University Student Code of Conduct while you are off-campus. Please review the code at http://www.towson.edu/studentaffairs/policies/documents/code_of_student_conduct.pdf before departure. *Note: If we are informed of any breaches to the code of conduct while you are abroad or away, there may be ramifications when you return to campus.*

Don't forget, at all times, including your free time, you will be representing TU, Maryland, and/or the U.S. in general. You should conduct yourself in a manner that you would not be embarrassed or ashamed to read about in the Towerlight or a major newspaper.

- Attendance at all program activities is required, including lectures, class time, and scheduled excursions.
- Students must be on-time for all program activities.
- If a student's behavior is deemed inappropriate or disruptive to the group by the faculty director, the student may be dismissed from the program and will receive no academic credit. Students dismissed from the program for behavioral issues will not receive a refund and will need to make their own arrangements for returning home.
- Notify the faculty director if you will be traveling during your free time.
- Avoid 'risky' activities such as bungee jumping; participating in political demonstrations; scuba diving; renting and operating motor vehicles of any type; solitary travel.

STUDY ABROAD & AWAY PREPARATION

Destination research

You should conduct research on the country or destination where you are studying in order to minimize culture shock and gain knowledge of the host country or destination.

The U.S. State Department is a superb resource for international travel. They provide free of charge, updated information on: the country, travel advisories, health and safety, overseas emergency advice, etc. Check the State Department website at <http://travel.state.gov/>.

Travel guidebooks are also an excellent resource for obtaining information on the destination. The Study Abroad & Away Office strongly suggests that you purchase a guidebook before departure. We recommend:

- Lonely Planet Survival Kit Budget Guide Book
- Rough Guide Book
- Let's Go Budget Guide Book

How to get there

If a group flight is **not included** in the program cost, students are responsible for making their own travel arrangements to the program location to arrive by the designated date and time. The Study Abroad & Away Office will identify a designated flight, and participants are strongly encouraged to book on the same flight. Students are advised to purchase refundable tickets and travel insurance in case of program itinerary changes or cancellation. Students should not purchase a flight until instructed to do so by the TU Study Abroad & Away Office.

If a group flight is **included** in the program cost, all program participants are required to travel on the designated flight. Exceptions may be requested from the Study Abroad & Away Office prior to ticketing of the flight if the participant's home address is located more than 200 miles from Towson University. If approved, the cost of the group flight will be deducted from the program cost.

Depending on your study away destination, perhaps you will be traveling my train or another method of transportation. These same policies for air travel apply to all methods of travel for your study away program.

Important issues for non-US citizens studying abroad

Before departure, non-U.S. citizens are required to consult with the International Student Office at their home institution. You are responsible for making sure that your immigration documents are in order for your return to the U.S. The Towson University International Student and Scholar Office is located on the 4th floor of the Psychology Building next to the Study Abroad & Away Office. Their phone number is 410-704-2421.

Permanent Residents (Green Card holders): If you are a permanent resident of the U.S. and plan to be away from the US for more than 12 consecutive months, please consult the INS at least one month prior to departure to ensure your permanent resident status.

Required documents for overseas travel

Passport

A valid passport is required for you to enter and leave the United States and other countries, including Canada and Mexico. Apply as early as possible and at least several months in advance at a U.S. Passport Agency or U.S. Post Office. For full passport instructions go to <http://travel.state.gov>.

If you already possess a passport, please check that it has not expired and that it will be valid for at least six months beyond your planned return to the United States. Keep a record of your passport number in a separate location from the passport itself. In addition, make a copy of the identification page and carry it separately from your passport. This will help if your passport is lost or stolen.

Visa

Some countries require foreign visitors to obtain a visa. A visa is often a stamp on a page of the passport that signifies an agreement on conditions of entry. In some cases, stays of more than three months require that you obtain a residence permit before leaving the country, instead of a visa. For short-term visits, a visa is not always required. The most common visa types are tourist, student, and work. Visa fees vary.

For most faculty-led programs you do not need to obtain a visa. You will receive instructions from the advisor in charge of your program if a visa is required. **IMPORTANT:** If you are not a U.S. citizen or Permanent Resident or do not hold a U.S. passport, please notify the advisor in charge of your program as soon as possible. Visa regulations for non-U.S. citizens may vary.

Health insurance information

Take a copy of your health insurance policy/coverage details with you. You will need this if you require medical treatment or medication while abroad or away. You may be asked for proof of your health insurance coverage when entering the host country.

Optional documents

Birth certificate

An official, state-certified birth certificate with a raised seal is invaluable if your passport is lost or stolen. A copy may be useful in the purchase of air tickets restricted to specific age groups.

Copy of your Passport

It is advisable to take a copy of your passport with you in case your original is lost or damaged. Keep the copy somewhere separate from the original.

What to bring

You may want to purchase certain items here in the United States before departure because they may be more expensive or unavailable abroad, depending on your country of destination.

For faculty-led programs, it is not required that you bring a laptop; however, many students choose to bring one. Some important questions to ask are the following: Will there be a safe place to store it? Will I really need it? Will I have access to a computer lab? Do I have the necessary converter? Am I comfortable carrying it while traveling? Should you decide to bring your laptop or other expensive electronic equipment, you can purchase additional insurance for these items.

If you choose to bring a personal cell phone with you from home, be aware of international roaming charges that may apply. Though convenient, this option can be expensive. Check in with your phone service provider for more information. If you do take your U.S. phone with you, be sure you understand how to turn off your mobile data and how to use your Wi-Fi. Keep in mind that you can use smart phone applications and cost effective programs such as Facebook and Google Talk to stay connected with those at home.

Essential

A good comprehensive **bilingual dictionary** is essential if visiting a non-English speaking country. Make an effort to learn a few key phrases before you go.

In general, suitable foreign substitutes can be purchased abroad for most **toiletries** since U.S. brands can be very expensive. However, your host country may not carry certain products (such as hair care items, make-up, etc.) that are designed to suit your specific needs. Bring a sufficient supply of these items including any ethnically oriented products that you use on a regular basis and for which you are not willing to accept a substitute or do without.

A good **travel guide** like *Lonely Planet* or *Rough Guide* is essential for each traveler.

Don't forget that electricity voltage and plug sizes vary around the world so we recommend substituting with battery operated or in some cases doing without electric appliances for the short duration of your program. Alternatively you can buy **converters and adaptors** for your existing appliances from a travel or hardware store before you leave. Check the World Electric Guide for a guide to voltage, electric and telephone plugs worldwide. We recommend bringing a battery powered **travel alarm clock** or buying one after arrival.

Nice to Have

A **journal** will be treasured in years to come. It will be interesting to note how your views on things change throughout your stay abroad or away. If you would rather not carry a journal, consider keeping a blog.

You will be happy to have some **photos** of family and friends; your new friends will want to see them.

Luggage

- Choose your luggage as carefully as you choose your wardrobe. Hard-sided suitcases are heavy when empty; you should only need one to carry breakable items. Soft luggage, duffel bags, and backpacks will serve you better and give you greater flexibility.
- Determine exactly what your needs are, especially when buying a backpack.
- You will be carrying your own luggage; porters are not provided on faculty-led programs. Bear that in mind when selecting luggage.

Wardrobe

- You will inevitably return with more than you take with you. Lay out all that you think you will need and reduce by at least one-third.
- It is usually better to bring more socks and underwear and fewer clothes. You want to take only the most **functional mix-and-match wardrobe** you can put together.
- Most of your clothes should be casual but not grubby, campus wear. Dark, conservative colors will wear longer without laundering and permanent press fabrics or knits will eliminate the need for ironing. Choose clothing items you can layer so that you can adapt to varying temperatures with the smallest amount of clothing.
- Research the season and the corresponding usual weather forecast(s) that tend to occur during that time while you'll be abroad or away. Be sure to pack the needed essentials accordingly. For example, if your destination tends to be rainy during the period you'll be there, be sure to pack a rain coat and umbrella.
- Be sensitive to what is considered acceptable dress in your host country or local environment. At the same time, it is also nice to have one or two favorite things that, even if unusual by their standards, help you to feel your best.

One of the most common remarks we hear from study abroad and away participants is that they brought too many clothes; you will probably be happier if you bring only the essentials.

Tips on Packing

- Passports and other documents should be carried with you securely yet readily accessible at Immigration and Border Control when you arrive. Consider storing all important documents in a large envelope or portfolio to keep them organized in your carry-on luggage.
- Put your address inside your suitcase as well as on the luggage tag in case the suitcase breaks or is lost in transit.
- Double check all container caps. Better yet, put shampoo, toothpaste, etc., in sealed plastic bags.
- The more room you leave in your suitcases on the way over, the more you can bring back.
- Passengers are allowed to bring a quart-sized bag of liquids, aerosols, gels, creams and pastes in their carry-on bag and through the checkpoint. These are limited to travel-sized containers that are 3.4 ounces (100 milliliters) or less per item.

Remember, pack lightly and leave valuables at home.

Airline baggage allowances

Some airlines allow only 44lbs (20 kilos) of check-in luggage, while others allow two suitcases of any size. Check with the airline on which you are flying to find out specific baggage allowances and weight or size restrictions. Overweight charges can add up, so plan accordingly.

Money matters

The ATM is the easiest and least expensive way to obtain cash while overseas or away. There are machines in most international airports. If you have a PIN, you can withdraw in local currency with your **ATM cash card** or **debit card** at an ATM machine, without having to enter the bank. You will probably be charged a small fee for using an ATM not owned by your own bank. Check with your bank for locations in your host country or U.S. destination and applicable charges. ATM machines may not be available in rural locations. Change your PIN number to four digits to ensure that you can access your account wherever you are.

Credit cards are now widely used in most countries and are convenient for making purchases. However, using your credit card to obtain a cash advance (in local currency) can involve many hidden charges. These cash advances are often considered a loan and you can get an advance only up to your line of credit. Be advised that each time a withdrawal is made from your account, an additional and variable fee is applied. Check with your bank and/or credit card companies for their fees. **Credit card cash advances are recommended for emergencies only.**

Notify your bank and credit card companies of your travel plans to avoid getting your accounts frozen due to suspicious activity. Include dates and locations. Inquire about international fees associated with using your card outside of the U.S.

Note: Your debit and credit card bill will reflect the exchange rate on the day your credit transaction was processed, which may be more or less than what you thought you were paying at the time of your purchase.

Bank transfers/drafts should be used for emergencies only. If you think you might need to use bank transfers, or want to take your initial currency in the form of a bank draft, visit your bank in the United States before you leave and ask them for a list of their correspondent banks. Let them know who is authorized to initiate cable transfers to you. Once in your host country, you can contact (telegram or phone) your bank at home and receive the money usually within 48 hours.

Be advised that you will probably have to pay the cabling charges both ways, in addition to a commission charged by your U.S. bank. Money can also be cabled from home through American Express; this type of transfer will take two to five days and the charge varies according to how much money is sent. Alternatively, you can notify your home bank and request that a bank draft in your name be mailed to you (registered), again at a specific bank and location. Bank drafts may take up to three weeks to clear.

It is not advisable or necessary to open a bank account in the host country for a short-term program.

It is a good idea to take **enough local currency** with you to pay for initial expenses before you can get to an ATM. It is also possible to exchange money at currency exchange bureaus at the airport. Some countries restrict how much currency you can bring in or out. Check with the appropriate embassy or consulate for any such requirements. Also, some local US banks will sell foreign currency or it can also be purchased in advanced from a variety of large travel companies like AAA or foreign exchange companies like Travelex for a fee. Even if you are traveling domestically, it is still a good idea to have some cash on hand with you during your travel. You may need it for any number of reasons: taking a taxi, purchasing something that is cash-only, or if there is no ATM readily available in your destination.

Carbon offsetting

When you travel, carbon-dioxide emissions contribute to global warming and climate change. Several websites have been established where you can calculate your impact and contribute to organizations that will make a difference to counteract the damage your travel creates by taking carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere or reducing it in another part of the world.

- www.climatecare.org/
- www.carbonfootprint.com
- www.ecobusinesslinks.com

IMPORTANT ISSUES FOR STUDY ABROAD STUDENTS

Registering with overseas embassies

All students participating in TU faculty-led study abroad programs will be registered in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program online by the Towson Study Abroad & Away Office prior to departure. This is a safety precaution.

Customs regulations

Customs declaration forms are distributed on ships and planes during international travel and should be prepared in advance of your arrival for presentation to the immigration and customs inspectors. Whether or not you have anything to declare, you must at least fill out the identification section of the form.

Upon entering any country, you must show your passport, turn in your customs declaration form, and pass through a baggage check. Customs regulations and procedures, as well as the purpose, nature, and thoroughness of the customs check vary from country to country.

CAUTION: Do not misrepresent what may be contained in a package. U.S. Customs opens packages regularly and randomly (not just “suspicious-looking” ones) and making a false declaration is a serious matter.

Articles prohibited from being brought into the United States:

- Agricultural products
- Books and tapes violating copyright laws
- Endangered species and their by-products
- Hazardous articles and substances (narcotics and dangerous drugs, toxic substances)
- Lottery tickets
- Obscene articles and publications

Remember that “duty-free” only means that you did not pay local taxes in the country of purchase. Also, prices in the duty-free shops may be higher than those in other stores.

See also the State Department Website at <http://travel.state.gov>

Culture shock

Culture shock is a very natural phenomenon that can be expected when a person moves from a familiar environment to a new setting where language, food, climate, and people’s actions are different.

No one enters a new culture simply as an individual -- the history, values and attitudes of the home culture are the extra baggage you bring with you. Many attitudes, values and beliefs are so taken for granted that they are accepted as the norm for all cultures. **In reality, each culture is different, but not better or worse than the other.**

At first you will probably feel only excitement and anticipation as you explore your new surroundings. However, after some time, you may find yourself with less energy and even less enthusiasm. The home culture becomes more appealing. You may be irritated with the food, people, and actions of the host country or environment. New experiences change from exciting to strange and different.

If you recognize that **this disorientation is a normal part of living in a new culture**, you can be reassured that the depressed feeling will pass. Only when you can accept the new culture, both its good and bad parts, will you begin to enjoy your new experiences. While it may be somewhat painful, culture shock can be a mind-stretching process that will give understanding and tolerance for the home and host cultures. There are many actions that can be taken to help overcome feelings of loneliness and withdrawal from a new culture. Keeping busy and setting goals are important.

Activities that can help you adjust to a new culture include the following:

- develop new friendships
- share feelings with other foreign students or advisors
- write in a journal or a blog
- maintain a sense of humor

Re-entry issues

Remember that culture shock can happen when you return to the United States or your home environment as well. On your return home, you may experience disorientation and a yearning for the host culture. The steps you took to adjust to the host environment will be useful in your readjustment to the home environment: **keep busy and set goals. Give yourself time to readjust and keep an open mind.**

Consider joining other study abroad and away alumni from the Baltimore area at the Baltimore Regional Study Abroad Re-entry Conference to learn how to market your experience professionally and explore other global opportunities. It's an opportunity to share your experiences with other students and speak with experts about other opportunities including volunteering, working, and graduate programs abroad. The conference is open to all students in the Baltimore metro area with an interest in leveraging a global experience for personal and professional benefit. Ask the Study Abroad & Away Office for more information about the upcoming conference.

Help from U.S. Consul

U.S. consular offices are located at U.S. Embassies and consulates in most countries. Consular officers are there to advise and help you, especially if you are in serious trouble of any kind. The Citizens Emergency Center is a branch of the U.S. consular office designed to assist United States citizens in emergency situations.

Consuls cannot do the work of travel agencies, information bureaus, banks, or the police. Do not expect them to act as travel couriers or interpreters, to search for missing luggage or to settle disputes with hotel managers. Consuls must devote their time and energy to those Americans who are in serious legal, medical, or financial difficulties.

What U.S. officials can do if you break the law is limited by foreign laws, U.S. laws, and geography. The U.S. government has no funds for your legal fees or other related expenses. However, you should consult a consular officer if you find yourself in a dispute that could lead to legal or police action.

Although U.S. consular offices cannot serve as attorneys or give legal advice, they can provide lists of local attorneys and help you find adequate legal representation. They will also do whatever they can to protect your legitimate interests and ensure that you are not discriminated against under local law. They cannot get you out of jail. IF YOU ARE ARRESTED, ask permission to notify the faculty member in charge of your program.

If your passport is lost or stolen, report the loss to the local police and your faculty director and go to the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate on the next business day to apply for a new one. If you have a police report, photos and proof of identification (or are accompanied by someone who can identify you), a new passport can often be issued the same day.

Legal requirements abroad

See also the State Department's Website at <http://travel.state.gov>

When you are in a foreign country, you are subject to its laws. There are no exceptions, so use good common sense. Develop a cultural and political awareness of your area to avoid inadvertent misunderstandings and political difficulties.

When you enter some countries and when you register at hotels, you may be asked to fill out a police information card listing your name, passport number, destination local address, and reason for traveling. In some nations, you will be asked to leave your passport at the hotel reception desk overnight in order that it may be checked by local police officials. These are normal procedures required by local laws.

You should be aware as well that many countries have laws under which you can be held "guilty by association." **It is wise to avoid others who are in possession of illegal goods of any sort.**

Some pointers:

- Deal only with authorized outlets when you exchange money or buy and sell airline tickets.
- Avoid areas of political unrest and disturbance.
- Do not deliver packages for anyone unless you are certain they do not contain drugs or other prohibited items.
- Become familiar with local regulations before you sell personal effects such as clothing, cameras and jewelry.
- **Don't assume that what is legal in the United States is also legal in other countries. Adhere to local laws strictly. The penalties you risk are severe.**

Drug Arrests

Many Americans are now in foreign jails on drug charges. If you are caught with illicit soft or hard drugs overseas, you are subject to local--not U.S.--laws. The penalties for possession are often the same as for trafficking.

If you are arrested, you will find that:

- Few countries provide a jury trial;
- Most countries do not accept bail;
- Pretrial detention, often in solitary confinement, may last for months;
- Prisons may lack even minimal comforts--bed, toilet, washbasin;
- Diets are often inadequate and require supplements from relatives and friends;
- Physical abuse, confiscation of personal property, degrading or inhumane treatment and extortion are not unknown.

If you are convicted:

- You may face a sentence of two to ten years in most countries or death in some countries, such as Algeria, Iran, Malaysia, Singapore, and Turkey.
- Very simply, it is a wise choice not to get involved with drugs while you are abroad. The apparent availability of drugs in some countries is illusory; often the dealer from whom you buy will turn you in and be paid by the police for their services.
- Avoid incurring the suspicion of authorities. Anyone carrying parsley in a film canister, or pills in a bottle marked “cough syrup,” may be subjected to the painful uncertainty of hours or even days of confinement while the laboratory analysis is completed.

Photography

People in some countries are very sensitive and impose strict requirements about what may not be photographed, such as police stations, military posts, etc. The same is true in various other locations within the U.S. Taking a picture of a harbor may seem harmless to you, but it might be construed as a threat to the country’s national security. Before you take out your camera, check for any signs posting restrictions or ask an official if it is okay.

Personal safety

As you are preparing for a study abroad or away experience, remember to make preparations for your personal safety as well. Many travelers fall victim to crimes because it is assumed they are carrying cash, and in an already-foreign environment, they are often easy to distract. **Americans are generally easy to spot and therefore easy targets. Try and blend in with the local people. While abroad or away, you should take the same common-sense safety precautions that you would at home.**

Money and Valuables

- Do not carry large amounts of cash.
- Keep your passport and money safe in a money belt or small purse that can be worn underneath your clothing. Wearing a purse on the outside highlights where you keep money and valuables; moreover, it can easily be cut or ripped from your shoulder. Many thieves will simply grab the bag and run, sometimes breaking arms in the process. If possible, don’t carry a handbag at all.
- Wrapping rubber bands around your wallet can make it difficult for a pickpocket to remove.
- Do not take valuable items with you when traveling.

Your Passport

- At all times guard your passport, visas, and other documents that you carry with you, and do not leave them in the outer flaps of your bags. It is better to have to dig for them the few times you will need them than to leave them out for anyone to steal.
- Before leaving, make a copy of the identification page of your passport. Keep this copy separate from your passport.
- If local law does not require you to keep your passport with you as a form of identification, carry only the photocopy of your passport when you are out and about.

When Traveling on your own

Contact ASIRT (Association for Safe International Road Travel) by phone at 310-983-5252 or at www.asirt.org for information on road safety abroad.

- Make sure someone else knows your itinerary.
- When you’re distracted, you’re an easy target for thieves. Do not leave your bags unattended.

- When you're on the telephone or reading a sign or train schedule, keep an eye on your bags. Remember: keep your eyes-and hands-on your bags at all times.
- Be especially alert in crowds. Train stations, crowded shopping areas and tourist spots, or any place with a crowd, is likely to be a place for thieves and muggers.
- Be careful to whom you give your luggage. Sometimes thieves pose as porters or taxi drivers.
- When you stay at a hotel, make use of the safety deposit boxes that many hotels have. Leave your passport and any money you don't expect to need that day safely locked away.

Out on the town

- Two are safer than one. Make an effort to meet the locals but DO NOT go with any strangers if you are alone.
- Dress to blend in with the local citizens.
- Find out which parts of town are considered risky by the locals. As in the United States, always stay in well-lit and well-traveled areas. Don't take short cuts through alleys or unsafe areas.

If you should fall victim to crime overseas, remember that the U.S. Embassy is there to help you. Every embassy and consulate has a duty officer on-call around the clock to assist in an emergency.

Perceptions from abroad and away

Students should be aware that political or natural events in their host country or destination might be in the news at home. News accounts often give a distorted picture of events and a false sense of imminent danger to those not on the scene.

- Keep in touch with family and friends and give them your sense of the local situation.
- Use mature judgment in deciding how to deal with any unusual event in your area.
- Be sure that your parents know how to reach the TU Study Abroad & Away Office in case they have particular concerns.

Racial issues abroad and away

In addition to culture shock, students may experience greater acceptance abroad or away, or perhaps encounter discrimination or even racism. Towson does not tolerate discrimination or racism on the part of the host institutions. Whether and to what extent students have such experiences in their dealing with society at large will vary greatly depending on the culture, socioeconomic, and political situation of the host country; where the your program is located within the destination; and the education level, perceptions, and attitudes of the people they encounter.

In dealing with such issues, try to remember some key points. First, being aware of your own self-image and expectations is very important. In addition, it is possible that other people's actions might reflect their curiosity about you. Therefore, **keep in mind your own cultural assumption when encountering new situations before jumping to conclusions.** It is also good to remember that you do have choices in how to deal with these issues. Finally, should any racial incidents arise, please speak to the TU Faculty Member leading your program. Should this fail to resolve the situation, please contact the TU Study Abroad & Away Office.

LGBTQ+ issues

It is important to be aware of the laws pertaining to sexuality in other countries as well as the general attitudes of the populace toward LGBTQ+ members of their community. The countries or areas you visit may be more or less 'liberated' (on a general U.S. scale of values) in these regards. Country-specific information is often available from

campus offices, personnel, and student groups, and the faculty member leading the program.

Another excellent resource is the ILGA: International Lesbian and Gay Association: <http://ilga.org/>. This group keeps tabs on countries all over the world and measures how gay-friendly they are in respect to equal rights, relationship status, and more. Review world maps, human rights activities, and read about the latest news effecting LGBTQ+ travelers and locals. ILGA Europe has a new system that ranks countries by gay-friendly aspects and creates a score.

Many LGBTQ+ students returning home from study abroad or away have shared their thoughts online in blogs and open forums. Networking with peers who have studied abroad or away will provide additional insight to the tips in guidebooks and articles.

Special note to females

Some women students in certain overseas countries (e.g. South America, the Middle East, and parts of Europe) have a hard time adjusting to attitudes they encounter abroad, in both public and private interactions between men and women. Some (but not all) men in such countries openly demonstrate their appraisal of women in ways that many American women find offensive. It is not uncommon to be honked at, stared at, verbally and loudly appraised, and to be actively noticed for being an American woman. Sometimes the attention can be flattering. However, it may become very annoying and potentially even angering. Indigenous women, who often get the same sort of treatment, have been taught how to ignore the attention. Many American women students find this hard to do. Eye contact between strangers or a smiling at someone passing in the street, while common in the U.S., may result in totally unexpected invitations. Some women feel they are forced to stare intently at the ground as they walk down the street.

You will have to learn what the unwritten rules are about what you can and cannot do abroad by asking locals and by reading guide books. Women can provide support for each other, and former students suggest that you get together early in your stay to talk about what works and what doesn't for dealing with the unwanted attention. American women are seen as "liberated" in many ways, and sometimes the cultural misunderstandings that come out of this image can lead to difficult and unpleasant experiences.

Needless to say, this special and surprising status may make male-female relationships more difficult to develop. Be careful about the implicit messages you may be unintentionally communicating. Above all, try to maintain the perspective that these challenging (and sometimes difficult experiences) are part of the growth of cultural understanding which is one of the important reasons you are studying abroad.

YOUR HEALTH: PREPARING TO TRAVEL ABROAD OR AWAY

See also the State Department's Website at <http://travel.state.gov>.

Good health is a prerequisite to an enjoyable stay abroad or away and crucial while you are traveling. You may be exposed to unfamiliar climates, food, medicines, and health care systems. In many cases, a good measure of common sense and a healthy respect for your own body (and its limitations) will help to avoid medical problems. A few preliminary precautions can spare you a good deal of unpleasantness.

Medical and dental checkups

Medical and dental checkups prior to your departure are a good idea. It is a good idea to review your travel plans with your physician. Frequently, health statements from your doctor are required to obtain a visa to enter your host country. Be sure to inform the Study Abroad & Away Office if your checkup raises any health issues or concerns not mentioned previously so that Towson can take steps to accommodate any needs you may have.

Shots and inoculations

Most TU faculty-led programs do not take place in countries where students need to get vaccinations and/or take medicine to prevent disease. However, for those destinations where it is recommended, you can get the medicines from your primary care physician or from travel health clinics.

- Passport Health Travel Clinic www.passporthealthusa.com/
- Johns Hopkins Health Clinic <http://web1.johnshopkins.edu/shcenter/>
- Towson University Health Center 410-704-2466

To find out if vaccinations are recommended for the country where you are going, check the National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at www.cdc.gov/travel.

Since many inoculations require more than one visit to the clinic or cannot be taken in combination with others, it is recommended that you begin your inquiries well in advance of your departure. You may be able to combine your physical checkup with an appointment for inoculations.

With regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, all participants on TU study abroad and away programs must abide by the Towson University vaccination policies.

Overseas medical emergencies

Seek medical assistance immediately! Your overseas health insurance will cover you for any emergencies that happen overseas. Notify your program faculty director as soon as possible.

You will be provided with a wallet-sized card including emergency information. This card is to be placed in your wallet and carried with you at all times. If you lose it, inform the faculty member leading your program for another copy.

Students participating on study away programs taking place within the 50 United States will not be covered by overseas health insurance. We recommend that you familiarize yourself with your individual health insurance coverage and make sure to carry that insurance card with you at all times while studying away in case of emergency.

Medicines

Prescription medicines

If you take prescription medicine, you should research whether it is available in your host country or area and **bring a copy of the prescription for the generic name of the drug** in case you need an emergency refill. You should take a supply that will last your entire stay. Your doctor may also recommend medications to bring along if they think you might be susceptible to a recurrence of a recent illness, infection, or allergy.

Regulations regarding amounts and types of medications that may be brought through customs will differ from country to country. Contact the host country consulate and/or your overseas insurance to confirm the availability of any medications in your host country and to ensure that you will be permitted to bring these specific medications into the host country with you.

If you have any favorite over-the-counter remedies that you use, you may want to take a supply for the duration of your stay, as it may not be available in your destination.

For customs purposes, take all medicines in their original containers. Also, carry all prescription medications in your carry-on bag whenever possible in the event that your checked luggage is lost in transit.

Syringes

Syringes can be construed as drug paraphernalia. Bring a doctor's note if you have to bring them (i.e. if you are a diabetic or require frequent medication by injection, as for allergies) AND check whether you need to acquire documentation from the host country consulate in the U.S. before you go.

Checklist of health items to bring

- Contact lens solutions
- Copy of prescription for generic version of any prescription medications you may need
- Extra pair of corrective lenses and prescription
- Feminine products
- First-aid kit
- Medic Alert emblem for specific medical problem
- Over-the-counter remedies
- Personal medical records including vaccination record
- Sunscreen

Staying healthy

There are a number of precautions you can take while abroad and away to ensure that you stay healthy. Here are some basic pointers:

- Monitor your health. Do not run yourself into the ground trying to see everything and to sample all the culinary delights. Moderation will pay off in the long run.
- Eat well. This does not mean spending money freely in elegant restaurants, but it does mean eating a well-balanced diet. **Note to vegetarians or vegans** -- You may find that maintaining a vegetarian diet abroad can be a challenge since many countries use meat or meat products as a staple of their cuisine. It may be difficult to obtain enough quality fruits and vegetables to maintain a healthy diet, and meal plans may or may not include vegetarian offerings. Some tips to help you through:
 - Be sure to tell the faculty member leading your program about your diet and/or specify any dietary restrictions. They will try to make appropriate arrangements for you.
 - Research the cuisine and foods offered in your host country or destination.
 - You may wish to bring protein powder, vitamins, and other dietary supplements with you to ensure good nutrition while abroad or away.
 - You may need to find a tactful way to deal with social situations in which you are offered specially prepared meals that include meat or meat products.
- Watch what you eat. Traveling will bring your body in contact with different bacteria, which are not necessarily harmful in themselves, but the change can unsettle your stomach or cause other health problems. Water, including ice cubes, milk, fresh fruit, and unwashed, raw vegetables could upset your system until your body adjusts to its new surroundings.
- Take measures to reduce the risk of exposure to STIs (sexually transmitted infections). Intimate contact could expose you to different bacteria or viruses that could lead to infections or contraction of STIs, including AIDS.
- Know where to get treatment. When you settle in, find out where health care facilities are located or ask the U.S. Embassy or your host program coordinator for the name of a doctor before the need for medical treatment arises.

Mental health

Pay attention to your state of mind and mental and emotional well-being. While abroad or away, find ways to reduce stress in order to maintain good mental health. Many students experience culture shock and varying degrees of homesickness while studying abroad and away. This is normal: do not be afraid to discuss your feelings with your faculty director and your peers. Think about what helps you clear your head back home. Do you like going for a run? Maybe writing in a journal? Employ these same tactics to relieve stress abroad or away.

If you feel overwhelmed and none of your stress relief tactics are doing the trick, then reach out! You can speak to your faculty director, on-site staff or the Study Abroad & Away Office.

JUST HOW BIG IS YOUR WORLD?

Now that you have read through this guide in its entirety, it's time to get out and explore! Go start your adventure and enjoy every moment.

We want to hear from you while you're abroad or away, whether you're there for one to two weeks or longer. You can stay connected in many ways:

- Post your photos to our Facebook page ([facebook.com/towsonuabroad](https://www.facebook.com/towsonuabroad))
- Tag us in your Instagram photos (@towsonuabroad)
- Tweet us #studyabroad or #studyaway adventures (@towsonuabroad)
- Keeping a blog while you're away? Share the link with us, and we'll publish on our Student Bloggers page at <https://wp.towson.edu/abroad/>

This is your adventure, your learning experience, and your time to grow. Remember, study abroad and study away is not a one-way street; share yourself and your experiences with others that you meet along the way and your experience will be all the richer. We promise your time abroad or away will broaden your perspective and your worldview. Find out for yourself: *How big is your world?*